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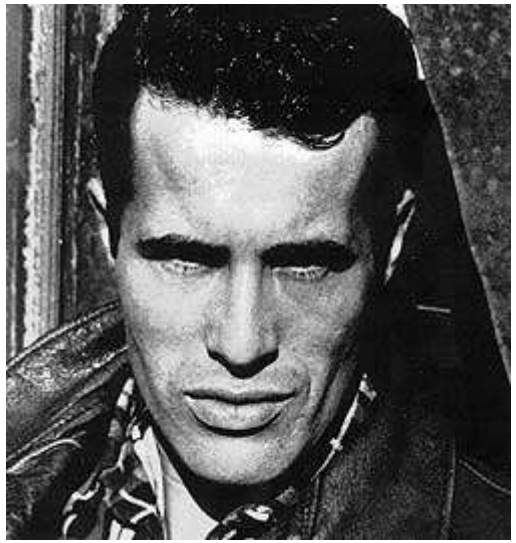
The Generalist

An alternative news and ideas channel on art, science, culture, politics and the environment, by freelance journalist, magazine editor and author John May.

Thursday, August 03, 2017

MICK FARREN INTERVIEWS KENNETH ANGER



Kenneth Anger
Source: www.phinnweb.org/links/cinema/underground/anger/

Mick Farren was hard to impress but I have a vivid memory of when he came back from an interview over lunch with Kenneth Anger. He was well chuffed that he had finally met one of his cult heroes.

As far as I am aware this article, which was published in the *New Musical Express* on July 31st 1976, has not been reproduced before. Much of Mick's work has been anthologised and is available in print or on the internet. Mick died on stage in July 2013 at the age of 69. Those who knew him still miss him like hell. Anger is 90 and still active.

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Photo Anya Saunders. Text and photos found on The Vaults of Erowid Obituary: The Independent Nicholas Carr-Saunders, writer and businessma...

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Top Left: Front and back covers of 1971 edition. Top Right: Front and back covers of 1972 edi...

ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY 1970s: BIT Travel Guide

The cover and introduction of the BIT travel guide The first "edition" of this guide, which

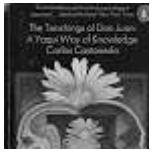
'In all probability, *Deep Throat* will be shown at your local Odeon long before any of the films of Kenneth Anger. Although he's been making films since 1939, has worked with Mick Jagger in the past and is currently finishing a movie project that involves, among others, Jimmy Page and Marianne Faithfull, none of his work has ever been exhibited on a mass scale.

The closest that the films of Kenneth Anger have ever come to reaching a popular audience was probably during the psychedelic '60s' when his movies *Fireworks* and *Scorpio Rising* were mainstays of the hippie clubs, underground film fests and arts labs both here and in the U.S.A.

There's more, however, to Kenneth Anger than simply being an underground film maker who still makes his own very personal movies when most of his fellows have moved on to porn, sexploitation or TV commercials. He is an almost unique example of a jet age eccentric who manages to live, work and survive even in the depressingly buck-worshipping '70s.

It's hardly surprising that Anger, with his background, should become some kind of grand eccentric. He was born into a hard-core Hollywood family. Almost as soon as he could walk, he was placed in the Maurice Kosloff school of dancing. At three his grandmother hustled him the part of a sprite in Max Reinhardt's film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (that's the one with James Cagney as Bottom). He

became known as the "Bible of ...



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It couldn't be put more plainly. The 'Marijuana Weekly News Roundup' on the 24/7 Wall street site (published 24th Jan 2016)...

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This is an article I wrote that was published in Issue 9 of The Face magazine [January 1981]. More on this important magazine to come. ...

ROCK JOURNALISM HISTORY: MUSIC MAGAZINES

Following on from my last post, further trawling through The

Kenneth Anger as the Stolen Prince: The Changeling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

talks about his early life with a kind of camp relish. "My dancing partner in those days was Shirley Temple. I doubt whether she'd speak to me now." He even hands out pictures of himself in the film.

In 1939, at the age of seven, he made his first film while he was in the Boy Scouts. In 1941 he made another, *Who's Been Rocking My Dreamboat*. At eleven he completed *The Nest*, a full-blown exploration of the subject of incest. He was only fifteen when he used a spare 72 hours (while his parents were away at his uncle's funeral) to make *Fireworks* which still gets shown in art cinemas today.

Fireworks is a savage homosexual fantasy. Filmed in grainy black and white, it is an account of how a group of archetypal butch/sadist U.S. sailors, straight out of a gay porn mag, rape and mutilate a young teenage boy. There is so much of the director/producer/actor's wish-fulfillment and basic fear projected into the film that it's still numbingly shocking today.

Throughout the '50s he made four more movies including *Inauguration Of The Pleasure Dome*, his first venture in psycho/sexual symbolic mysticism. Anger describes the film as "a full scale ritual to invoke Horus, the Godhead of the Aquarian Age." He also started work on a movie version of the S&M erotic classic *L'Histoire d'O* ('Story of O' to you), but the money ran out and it was never finished.

1964 saw the completion of *Scorpio Rising*, a loving examination of the faggot end of bike-gang with a rock and roll soundtrack that includes songs by Dion, Presley, the Chiffons, and the Shirelles.

Scorpio Rising is, to date, Anger's most popular and best remembered movie: It, too, has its mystical undertones. As Anger put it, "Scorpio is the sign of violence and death. It's also the sign that governs machines. It was natural to celebrate it with a film centred around the Hell's Angels and leather boys."

A year later he started work on *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, a sequel to *Scorpio Rising* that, again with a rock and roll score, did for an apocalyptic hot rod gang what *Scorpio Rising* did

Generalist Archive has turned up some other pioneering music magazines from ye...

ROCK KING JIMMY PAGE by CHRIS SALEWICZ

Having already got acclaimed biographies of Bob Marley and Joe Strummer under his belt, Chris Salewicz (a mate of mine from the NME of th...

HAIL SISTERS OF THE REVOLUTION

It seems totally appropriate that a copy of 'Hail Sisters of the Revolution' by my dear friend writer/poet/musician Caroline Gilfi...

ANCIENT CITIES: AMAZONIA2 and GREAT PLAINS [USA]

Seven years ago this month, THE GENERALIST ran a long piece on the archaeological discoveries in Amazonia that showed evidence of a cons...

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for the Hell's Angels. It predated Manson's plans for his dune buggy attack battalion by some four years.

In 1968, Anger started work on the first version of *Lucifer Rising*, a fast moving collage of Crowleyan magic, and his most ambitious project. There seemed, however, to be a jinx on the film. The majority of the footage was lost and all that remains is an eleven-minute fragment retitled *Invocation Of My Demon Brother*. A synthesiser track was added to the film by Mick Jagger. According to Anger, it was this work on the film that inspired Jagger to write the first draft of "Sympathy For The Devil."

Today Anger is finishing up the second version of *Lucifer*, working on the soundtrack with Jimmy Page, promoting the paperback version of his book *Hollywood Babylon*. He is also a leading disciple of occultist, misunderstood genius and Great Beast Aleister Crowley.

*

Okay, so that's the background. With all this in mind, I went to my lunch date with Kenneth Anger with a great deal of curiosity as to what kind of figure I was going to meet.

Would he be a mincing queen, a total fraud, a poseur or some sinister figure out of a Hammer Films version of a Dennis Wheatley black magic epic?

It was one of the first really warm days of the summer. I had arranged to meet him in the foyer of the British Film Finance Corporation. He was there to negotiate the finishing-up money for *Lucifer Rising*. At least he followed the same route as other money-starved film producers. He didn't make piles of gold coins appear in the middle of a sinister pentagram.

The person who came down the stairs was pretty normal. He wore a lightweight cafe-au-lait suit and could just as easily have been jiving up the money for *Confessions Of A Randy Dustman* as a movie based on the philosophy of Crowley The only bizarre touch was a gold pentagram hanging from a chain round his neck. (Later he was to roll up his sleeve and reveal that he had the same symbol tattooed on his arm. "My mark of the Beast.")

As we walked across Greek Street to a nearby French restaurant, the sun didn't darken, nobody threw us fearful glances, and dogs didn't snarl or howl. In fact, Anger, who looked rather like a male beach hero running into the first phase of middle-aged paunch, proved an amiable individual with a sharp, if campy and cutting, wit.

After we'd settled down at a table, gone through the ritual of ordering and I was into my first gin and tonic of the day, the conversation kicked off with an obvious question.

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PAUL OLIVER: WORLD EXPERT ON THE BLUES AND VERNACU...
ARTIVISTS: VISUAL CULTURE
SPIKE HAWKINS TRIBUTE [1942-2017]

Original publicity still for *Lucifer Rising* featuring a 1940 illustration by Virgil Finley. On the back is a copyright sticker and a hand-written sticker that says 'World Premiere. Easter Sunday '77.' [The Generalist Archive]

"There's been a lot of weird rumours about what happened to the first version of Lucifer Rising. What actually happened to the film?'

The answer was as weird as any of the rumours.

"You know that, in that version, Bobby Beausoleil played Lucifer?"

I nodded.

"This is the same Bobby Beausoleil who joined up with Manson, and was jailed for the Gary Hinman murder?"

"That's right. Of course, all this was some time before he got involved with Charles Manson's escapades."

"Escapade" is a lovely word in the context. There's something quite fascinating about any one who can deal with a first-hand contact with terminal sleaze in such a lightly urbane manner.

"Bobby was living with me in San Francisco. It must have been the end of 1967 or the beginning of 1968. It was the time when the hippie scene was turning into a complete fuck-up. The flower children had started shooting up speed. It was all very depressing. Bobby had this fantasy about starting a rock and roll band. I got some money for him and he went down saying he was going to buy amplifiers and equipment.

"Of course, when he came back there wasn't any equipment or any money left. Instead I found several kilos of grass hidden in my cutting room. This was just too much. I told him to get out. A few nights later he

MICK FARREN INTERVIEWS KENNETH ANGER

BACKPACK AMBASSADORS and the TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY...

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broke in and stole most of the unedited film. Later he claimed I tried to turn him into a toad."

"Did you ever find out what happened to the film?"

"I suppose it's buried out in the Mojave somewhere. I thought of getting a guy with a divining rod to look for it."

“And Beausoleil's now doing life?"

"He was twenty-one when he went in. I doubt if he'll ever get out."

Bobby Beausoleil mug shot. 1969. Source: Wikipedia

*

The conversation moves on to films. After Warhol's posture of seedy decadence and Godard's trendy Marxism, Anger is refreshingly down-to-earth. He has little time for the kind of cineaste who wants to prattle about art and symbolism. He is Hollywood born and bred, and many of the terms of reference in the conversation are unashamed trash; Roger Corman, *Night Of The Living Dead*, Mae West, *Invasion Of Body Snatchers*.

He also has a devout love of gossip. One minute he’s talking lofty metaphysics. the next he’s letting go a choice morsel of name-dropping.

The Generalist wishes to thank the following for their generous contributions:

Peter Mobbs (for Liberty)

Michael Marten

David May

Alexander Hay

Raphael Whittle

Charlotte Skeet

“I think I’m getting rather tired of Mick Jagger. It's all getting rather childish and petulant. There was a party at a pub just out of London where he threw a table through a window because some people told him to make less noise. It does seem rather unnecessary”

The next moment he has grasshoppered back to his latest movie.

“Lucifer is the hero. He shouldn't be confused with the Christian devil. Lucifer is another name for the Morning Star, the bringer of light. He is the one who helps man in his search for truth and enlightenment."

Prometheus?"

“A very similar character." He jumps on to a story about the making of the film.

“The next Lucifer after Bobby was Chris Jagger. Unfortunately he started taking himself very seriously. We were shooting in Egypt, in desert, near the pyramids. Marianne was having a bad time, she was strung out on heroin."

Anger pauses.

"I don't think that's an indiscretion, is it? Marianne's always been very open about the problems she's had with drugs. She was also being eaten alive by mosquitoes. We started to believe that the heroin in her bloodstream was attracting them.

"At the same time, Chris Jagger began acting like some kind of Hollywood prima donna. You know? Turning up late, that sort of thing. We were working on a very tight budget and starting to run out of money. It all got so difficult that Chris had to go."

"Marianne plays Lilith, the Jewish demon. She is also the goddess of abortion. It seems kind of appropriate."

From Lucifer (the bringer of light) we move on to Aleister Crowley. "Crowley was a greatly misunderstood genius. After World War I, the British newspapers did their best to destroy him, particularly the Beaverbrook newspapers. They labelled him the wickedest man in the world and presented him as some kind of Satanist. After one of his group died from drinking contaminated water, stories went round about murders. Crowley could have sued but he never tried. I don't think it occurred to him."

Far from being any kind of Satanist, Anger paints a picture of Crowley as a searcher for truth and enlightenment through the essential human sexual energy. For this, he was pilloried by a

vicious press and sensation-hungry public. Even when talking about Crowley, however, Kenneth Anger can't resist a gossipy anecdote.

"It got so bad that, when Crowley wanted to conduct certain nude rituals, the only place he could do it was at the Turkish baths in Jermyn Street. All these people would sit round in their towels watching this middle-aged gentleman waving his arms about. They didn't have a clue that it was Crowley conducting one of his most important rituals. They probably thought it was some sort of calisthenics."

American paperback copy of *Hollywood Babylon* [Dell Publishing 1975], bought at the Academy Bookshop [7/8 Holland Street London W8] .I have written my name in the frontispiece and the date: December 1977. [The Generalist Archive]

Anger's love for gossip and scandal came to fruition in his book *Hollywood Babylon*. The book is a virtual directory of suicide, murder, drug addiction and excess in the movie capital of the '20s and '30s. Unfortunately, it is unlikely to be published in this country under the current libel laws. Unlikely, that is, until the last of the people mentioned in the book have died.

"The stumbling block is the section on Chaplin. No British publisher could get that past the lawyers."

The coffee and brandy arrives. It's getting close to wind-up time. We've drifted into discussion of the age of Aquarius. With someone like Kenneth Anger this is very easy. He seems to see Crowley as a kind of John the Baptist for the epoch. Anger is, however, very matter of fact about his mysticism.

"We're probably in for a rough time: The age of Aquarius isn't quite what they sing about in "Hair". The predictions are that there'll be 500 years of utter chaos with hate, conflict and false prophets. It could be tough before we finally achieve enlightenment."

It's hard to sum up Kenneth Anger. He is a very complex personality, part Hedda Hopper and part mystic. He is obviously obsessed with his work.

"I can't tolerate the kind of lazy fuck-offs who talk all the time and don't do nothing. I can't think of anything but work, there's nothing else."

He can even get away with the ponderous statement that is reproduced in a current press handout.

"I have always considered movies evil; the day that cinema was invented was a black day for mankind... Photography is a blatant attempt to steal the soul . . . My films are primarily concerned with sexuality in people. My reason for filming, has nothing to do with 'cinema' at all; it's a transparent excuse for capturing people . . . it's wearing a little thin now. . so I consider myself as working Evil in an evil medium."

When you meet the man, the first impression is that he delivers these kind of statements with his tongue firmly in his cheek. And yet he is also perfectly serious. It's an odd paradox.

*

'Legendary filmmaker and occultist Kenneth Anger has released a limited edition run of Lucifer jackets, inspired by his classic 1972 short film ‘Lucifer Rising.’ Originally worn by actor Leslie Huggins in the film, the iconic multicoloured design has been embroidered onto a limited number of black nylon bomber jackets. Gold satin bomber jackets are also available from Anger’s official online store at collectors’ prices. Each jacket is unique featuring a stitched label of authenticity.'

Source: *Coney's Loft [15th March 2017]*

Published by Black Dog Publishing 2004

To my knowledge this is the best single book on Anger's oeuvre, containing as it does detailed essays on all his key films with images + a great deal more besides.. The entry on *Lucifer Rising* is very interesting and adds more detail to the story. Hutchinson writes:

'The concept of *Lucifer Rising* began in 1966 while Anger was in San Francisco as a "sequel" or response to *Scorpio Rising* from the beginning of "the new age". Much of the original footage shot went missing during one of Anger's ritual performances at the Straight Theatre... with the rest of the footage shot at this time edited by Anger in London. Led Zeppelin's resident Crowley aficionado, Jimmy Page proposed the orginal soundtrack for *Lucifer*, which was removed in the 1981 re-edited version and replaced by Bobby Beausoleil's composition.'

To produce the soundtrack, Beausoleil formed the Freedom Orchestra in prison. Hutchison says that the instruments were delivered by mail order and that Anger provided him with a time sheet for the film. A full and complete remastered version is now available according to the Beausoleil website.

According to Hutchinson, Anger and Page first met at a Sotheby's auction of Crowley books in 1973. Page at that time had the second largest collection of Crowley's work in the world and was living in Crowley's former house at Boleskine on the edge of Loch Ness in Scotland.

Page worked on the film for three years and produced 28 minutes of music. Anger had been using the film editing facilities in the basement of Page's Victorian mansion for three months when there was, one night, some kind of altercation with Page's girlfriend which lead to Anger being evicted.

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